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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002630

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRO-KURDISH LEADER AHMET TURK DEFENSIVE IN MEETING WITH EU AMBASSADORS

REF: A. ANKARA 2604 B. ANKARA 2605 C. ANKARA 2595

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for reasons  
1.4(b) , (d)

1.(C) Summary: EU ambassadors told Democratic Society Party (DTP) leader Ahmet Turk, DTP MP Akin Birdal, and party whip Fatma Kortulan October 23 that DTP must distance itself from the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and call on the PKK to lay down arms immediately. Turk responded defensively, according to our EU contacts, saying DTP cannot distance itself from the PKK until Turkey's Kurds are granted full cultural rights. With DTP under continuing judicial attack, ostracized in parliament, and facing mob-like confrontations throughout the country, Turk claimed it is impossible to denounce the PKK without alienating DTP's grassroots support. DTP is making itself sadly irrelevant by refusing to play a more constructive - and courageous - role amidst the volatile atmosphere and intense pressure created by recent PKK attacks. End summary.

2.(C) EU ambassadors met October 23 with DTP leader Ahmet Turk, as part of a series of lunches with Turkish officials. European colleagues said the EU ambassadors told Turk that following the October 21 PKK attack (ref A), it was critical that DTP condemn all forms of violence, clearly distance itself from the PKK, and call on the PKK to lay down arms immediately. (Note: Meeting with EU ambassadors just prior to their meeting with Turk, Ambassador urged them to deliver this same tough message.)

3.(C) Turk responded defensively, according to our contacts, saying with the current pressure on DTP, the party cannot alienate its voter base by condemning the PKK. Producing a summary of dozens of court cases and investigations against DTP members, Turk told the ambassadors that the continuing judicial campaign against the party hindered its ability to contribute to a peaceful solution. All parties had ostracized DTP in parliament by refusing to meet with them or even sit in the same office wing, he added. Following the most recent PKK violence, DTP offices had come under attack from stone-throwing mobs (ref C). Turk pointedly told the ambassadors that he would be murdered in minutes if he were to try to walk from parliament to the adjacent Kizilay neighborhood, where a large anti-terrorism demonstration was taking place. He also complained that while all were calling on DTP to condemn the PKK, no one had asked DTP for its political ideas. The public, he said, is simply not ready to accept DTP or its grassroots, even though they are an

important part of Turkey's colorful mix of cultures.

4.(C) Akin Birdal told us separately that Turk had tried to convey to the EU ambassadors the intense pressure and physical risk DTP members are facing, and had reiterated that DTP opposes violence and has already distanced itself from the PKK. Birdal said DTP MPs and members fear for their safety amid the increasing demonstrations and tense atmosphere, which he charged was being stoked by opposition People's Republican Party (CHP) and Nationalist Action Party (MHP) supporters. In some of the latest attacks, groups threw rocks at DTP offices in Izmir, Bahcelievler, Samsun, and Eskisehir; a suspect fired a pump-action rifle at the DTP office in Zetiburnu; and people had set furniture and offices on fire in Istanbul and Antalya. He noted that the police had provided no increased security for DTP MPs or at DTP offices.

5.(C) Comment: Facing pressure from all sides and intense public anger, DTP's refusal to denounce the PKK is sidelining the party at a critical moment. Turk, a DTP moderate, is undoubtedly under pressure from more extreme elements to maintain the party line. By failing publicly to distance DTP from the PKK, however, the party is missing a historic chance to dispel continuing doubts about its loyalties and contribute to peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue. In fact, DTP's base has already shrunk, with many turning to the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Turk's approach may please hard-line DTPers but risks both alienating those DTP supporters who want an end to PKK violence and rendering the party irrelevant. End comment.

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